

GUIDE

A Publication of the Paulist Fathers

TYPES OF INQUIRERS

THE UN-CHURCHED

by William P. Manning, C.S.P.

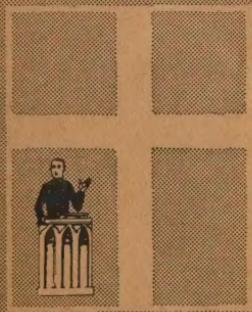
THE PROTESTANT

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OCTOBER 1960, No. 151



REV. VICTOR L. GOOSSENS
ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY
INDIANAPOLIS 4, IND.
SIXTY-NUMERO, NEW JERSEY ST.



IT SEEMS TO ME

Bigots or Friendly Neighbors?

Let's hope that American Catholics will lose neither their patience, sense of proportion nor zeal for conversions because of the recent rise in anti-Catholicism. Nothing would be easier than to fume, to conclude that most non-Catholics are in bad faith and despair of America's conversion to the Faith.

This new revival of bigotry could be salutary if it persuaded American Catholics to ask themselves some pertinent, searching questions. Why do so many of our neighbors, in a day when the means of communication are so accessible, harbor misgivings about Christ's Church? Why do so few lay Catholics manifest the willingness and capacity to answer the religious questions of an inquiring non-Catholic? Does the average Catholic parish proclaim a readiness to welcome interested non-Catholics and provide an inquiry class for their instruction?

Fortunately, increasing numbers of priests, seminarians, religious and laity are asking these questions. And their effort has won greater acceptance, vitality and depth for the Apostolate to non-Catholics.

They are convinced that in a land where some 140 million people are not in the fold—the Church has no choice but to go on a mission footing. And they find among non-Catholics, not only those who are bigoted, but very many more who are genuinely interested to learn more about Catholicism.

The result is that during the past year we have been able to announce two national conferences for priests on the subject of convert making, along with many one-day workshops for priests. Study clubs on convert-making are on the increase in seminaries. Conventions of the laity more frequently schedule a session on this apostolate. And highly significant is the three-day workshop for Nuns on their role in winning converts reported in this issue.

Last but not least, 1,313 priests last year became new subscribers to GUIDE. Our apostolate is unquestionably on the march.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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Types of Inquirers

THE UN-CHURCHED

By William P. Manning, C.S.P.

For our purpose, it might be helpful simply to dwell on some of the outstanding traits found in those who have little or no connection with any church. I cannot claim extensive experience with this group. My observations are based mainly on my five years at the Information Center at Grand Rapids, Michigan. A careful survey of the 1,500 converts received at this center in the last ten years, indicates that 90% were without church affiliation.

It is unfortunate that the word "un-churched" as used to designate prospects without church membership, has so mellow a ring to it. It fails to convey an adequate description of their attitude toward religion. Nor does it give any clue to the basic problems that often impede their progress toward the Church. The destructive virus possessed by the un-churched is not merely a failure to be anchored in a particular religious group. They are not only un-churched, they are often de-christianized and frequently almost de-spiritualized.

They come from a materialistic environment which directs them toward the goal of well-adjusted, well-balanced material abundance. They are reared and nourished in an industrial civilization, during an era of universal strain and anxiety. And out of this background they come to us, I believe, with some seven characteristics which we must take into account.

First, spiritual things seem to have little reality for them. This does not necessarily mean that they have rejected God after mature deliberation. Nor does it signify that they consciously deny man's supernatural destiny. God has simply faded into the

background of their existence. They habitually fail to relate their every-day life to God. They strive for proximate ends without any consideration for the ultimate purpose of life. If in your inexperience, you should ask the great questions: "What are you doing here?" "Where are you going?" you had better be prepared for some ludicrous answers indeed.

In dealing with these people, I am convinced that the first task of the instructor is to try to make God real for them. In our very first contacts, we must present the love of God in such a way as to make the inquirer realize that God has an individual, intimate, personal love for *him*. It is not sufficient to speak of the universality of God's love. We must convince him that there is a unique relationship between God and himself.

Those who have had a college education, can present a special problem. Their training fits them better for compromise rather than for distinguishing objective truth. They are less adept at logic than in superficial ways of resolving a conflict. And they often have a capacity for endless discussion. They have familiarity with words but less understanding of the meanings of words. When your instruction jeopardizes their way of life, they resist. And they shift ground endlessly. The extreme of this can be frustrating. It is an obstacle to communication and thus may render our instructions ineffective. If such a person intends to become a Catholic simply because of marriage, his charm may be deceptive. And two or three years after marriage he may cease to be a practising Catholic. Fortunately, the extreme cases I've just been describing are not numerous.

Their second characteristic is an inability to make far-reaching personal decisions.

Anything that seems remote from the physical necessities of life and day-to-day affairs reduces them to indecision. This perhaps should not be surprising since they think so little of ultimate goals and are vague as to life's real purpose. Besides, in their daily work, policies are determined by a business firm and decisions are made by a board or committee. Much of the responsibility for personal choices has been taken out of the hands of many people today. Sometimes they manifest a certain powerlessness and a feeling that events are simply carrying them along in many of the great events of life.

It follows that the instructor must aid them in this respect. They must be made aware that some personal decision becomes necessary once one has learned so much about Christ. And while respecting their freedom of choice, the priest must advise them wisely in how to come to a firm resolution.

SEEK APPROVAL

Thirdly, they seem to be extremely dependent on group approval. This can be helpful on occasions. When they are close to Catholic influences, it may facilitate their approach to the Church. And after their conversion, Catholic surroundings may assist their development in the Faith and contribute to their perseverance. If they are from a non-Catholic climate, however, then this hostile environment may create added difficulties in living the Christian life, and may defeat their best intentions.

This craving for the approval of others can be very deep—even when people are not altogether conscious of its presence or strength. So when a convert is married to a non-Catholic or must live at home with parents or relatives who disapprove of his religion, it can easily be seen how problems are multiplied for him.

There's a type of inquirer who seems to be becoming more common among our prospects. And this brings me to a fourth feature of the un-churched. They are often the ones who seek emotional and psychological security in religion. A common case is where a mentally disturbed or maladjusted individual is advised by a psychiatrist or social worker to seek the consolation and therapeutic help religion can give.

Sometimes a zealous, well-meaning Catholic will urge them to undertake instructions in Catholicism.

In justice to this inquirer, it is necessary to explain that conversion will not of itself solve all his emotional problems. Obviously if we instruct and baptize a paranoid—we now have a paranoid in the state of grace. Prayer, Holy Mass and the Sacraments are means of grace and do have their effects even in the realm of mental health. But the inquirer must realize that conversion will not automatically win for him the adjustment he may be seeking.

When all is said and done, however, many of these people do seem to find—along with the deeper blessings of Catholicism—the emotional assistance they desire. There seems to be definite improvement in solving the difficulties that confront them. I notice, too, that the Rosary has great attraction for people disturbed by serious mental and emotional difficulties. It seems to be of tremendous help to them.

Characteristic number five is something of a paradox. One finds in the un-churched a certain weak resistance to any infringement of personal liberty, a measure of resentment against interference in their private affairs. Yet all this goes along with a great desire for a strong authority which can give them clear guidance and definite direction. It is not easy to explain how these seemingly incompatible desires can be harmonized. Yet we do see people who seem disinclined to accept authority while desiring, at the same time, the security which comes from obedience to religious authority.

Self-dissatisfaction and a desire for self-improvement is a sixth feature of the people we are considering. Deep within their souls they blame themselves for their moral failures and sins, and hold themselves responsible for their shortcomings. I personally have never had a convert who, at least in the case of major sins, ever denied or was unaware of their gravity. Holding themselves responsible, they are sometimes tormented by guilt and mystified by their inability to change for the better.

Consequently, one of the most powerful influences attracting them to Catholicism is her mark of Holiness. The exemplary life of a devout Catholic makes a profound impression upon them. Then when they study

Catholic teaching, the doctrine of Original Sin offers them an explanation of human weakness; while the doctrine of divine grace promises them the strength which they could not find in themselves, to overcome their weaknesses.

The final and seventh characteristic of the un-churched inquirer is his tendency to test everything on the basis of its pragmatic consequences, not by its truth.

"What does this mean in my life? What can it do for me?" This has convinced me that we cannot neglect to stress the relevance of Catholic truth to daily life in order to prepare people for its acceptance. And it is especially necessary to indicate that it is the whole totality of Catholic truth, morals and sanctifying gifts that explains the noble life of a good Catholic.

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THE PROTESTANT

By John J. Keating, C.S.P.

In view of the diversity of Protestant sects and the universal scope of the difficulties and objections that they manifest, I have decided to approach the matter of Protestant inquirers from my own experience with Protestant groups at Ohio State University. In the last three years I have frequently spoken to assemblies of Protestants and I have found that there are dominant questions that differentiate them. This is a selective approach, but I think it is practical.

The most professional group that I have addressed was a convocation of Lutheran ministers. Some seventy-five of them were gathered for what we would call a clergy conference. As you are probably aware, there have been some resolutions passed by the Lutherans advocating the study of Catholicism, not simply in the expectation of reaffirming the Protestant position in good conscience. They hope to discover whatever common ground there exists between us and perhaps even make the idea of unity less remote.

These men were extremely polite. It was obvious that they entertained no foolish optimism about unity, and some probably thought that it was idle to talk about it. But a number were sympathetic to the idea and felt that it should be thoroughly explored. They were inclined to regret that the Reformation had taken place, but they were sure that it had been forced by the superstition and corruption that had crept into the Church. It was, they believed, the only alternative to complete demoralization.

I gave them a brief review of Catholic

teaching on the matter of reform within the Church, and then answered questions. They were greatly interested in the doctrine of grace and the sacramental system. They seemed to have little idea of what we mean by supernatural life. One of them asked if such a concept did not lead to Pantheism. These things were points of calm discussion, as was also the nature of the Church and its organization. No one seemed greatly perturbed, even about infallibility.

The one thing that introduced heat and some evidence of hostility was mariology. Once this subject was raised a disproportionate amount of time was devoted to it. This was the doctrine that stuck in their throat. In a nutshell, they believe that theirs is the Church of Christ, while ours is the Church of the Virgin Mary.

Another group with whom I have had some dealings are the Methodists. They are the largest religious group at Ohio State University and one of the most diverse in their doctrine. In a survey published many years ago by Betts, a professor at Northwestern University, doctrinal diversity was more marked in the case of Methodist ministers than of any others. You never quite know what a Methodist might have been taught, or what he might believe.

The Methodists that I have met have been student groups active in their churches. Their questions are what might be called the typical questions of Protestants. Like the Lutherans, they invariably ask about Mary and the saints. But, whereas the Lutherans ask out of some definite background of doctrine, the Methodists ask out

of some unreasoned conviction that these things must be an embarrassment to us, superstitions that we have been saddled with since their invention in the middle ages. The other dominant questions are those concerning purgatory, confession and the Mass. These inquirers are sure that there is no rational or scriptural basis for such beliefs; and unless they are properly disposed through some other circumstances and the grace of God, they often seem to have a closed mind to any explanation. You can see them getting the next bomb ready while you are carefully demolishing the one they have already dropped.

The Presbyterians are the second largest Protestant group at the University. They have long abandoned most of the teachings of John Calvin. I have spoken to both university and high school groups of Presbyterians. They raised many of the questions that the Methodists ask, but the influence of Calvin that still remains was manifested in their particular objections. They showed a large concern with the morality of drinking and gambling. For them, these actions are intrinsically evil, and they cannot understand how the Catholic Church can even begin to permit them.

DRINK AND GAMBLING

With many individual inquirers, well-disposed people, this same concern is frequently expressed. I think that drinking and gambling have been presented to them so luridly, that they fear demoralization in their family life should they become involved—even in a mixed-marriage—with a religion that seems to foster beer and bingo.

Merely from the standpoint of good public relations, we ought not to ignore this sensitivity or treat it as pure pharisaism. We all realize that the economics of running a parish impels many pastors to undertake fund-raising activities that they would rather omit. But it surely doesn't lend dignity to the Church to turn its basements into casinos and its schoolyards into circuses. And I know that many Catholics as well as non-Catholics are shocked to find school children selling lottery tickets.

Finally, there are other groups, composed mostly of Protestants, but with a sprinkling of Jews and unbelievers. These are the fraternities, sororities and dormitory clubs.

They are all eager for religious discussion and, not being under any immediate pastoral jurisdiction, they are freer in their questions. They are mostly church-going people and some of them are very strong in their religious affiliation, but the points they raise for discussion are more basic and more practical.

They have been emancipated at least partially from their familiar background. They have been introduced to a world of new ideas, many of them alien and even contradictory to what they have already learned. And most of them experience some confusion.

Their basic questions concern the existence of God, the soul, predestination, free will, and the divinity of Christ. For the most part, their previous religious training has not prepared them to see the problems to which these matters give rise. When they meet these real difficulties in their classes or in conversation with their companions, they begin to wonder about them. For many, this is the beginning of a break with religion.

A VAST IGNORANCE

They have a vast ignorance about these questions. For the most part they repeat catch phrases or dilemmas. Some of them have just discovered the subject of evolution and vaguely feel that this is the answer to everything. They don't really believe this, but the claim seems unanswerable to them. At times they will bring up the old chestnut which some professor has put to them: Can God make a stone so big he can't lift it? Or they will present this in its more recent form which runs like this: God is all-powerful and God is all-good. But there is evil in the world. But if God is all-good there could not be evil unless he were not all-powerful. And if he is all-powerful, then he is not all-good.

There is not one in a hundred among them who could begin to give a cogent argument for the existence of God, let alone for the divine perfections. The closest most of them ever get to a demonstration of the existence of God is a confused medley of teleology and causality. They say: Someone must have made all this. Regarding the divinity of Christ, they have acquired some vague idea that the Dead Sea scrolls some-

The Church's teaching on purity attracts even those who regard it as an unattainable ideal.

how support those who deny it. But, in nearly every case, their information is garbled.

Now I don't mean to suggest that these people are heading straight out of their churches to atheism or agnosticism. Some of them go through such a phase, and some may never get through it. But even those who would like to reframe the moral law, do not really want spiritual realities to be discarded. They are generally eager to construct or reconstruct the bases for their belief. It is a part of being true to themselves that they must rediscover the harmony of faith and reason.

On the practical side, their questions are mostly about marriage. This is understandable, since they are all of marriageable age. On this subject we run the whole gamut: from the morality of courtship to the obligation of sending one's children to a parochial school. Whatever they might think about drinking and gambling, they have convinced themselves that there is nothing wrong with petting or necking, so long as they don't go all the way. This is regarded as permissible for anyone who is going steady. It is even expected of anyone who is keeping company. And it is practically obligatory for those who are engaged. It is difficult to oppose these assumptions. Yet these people are attracted by the Church's teaching on purity, even when they regard it as an unattainable ideal.

Some of them are upset by the Church's attitude on mixed-marriages. But most of them are opposed to mixed-marriages; and if they do fall in love with a Catholic, they are prepared to take instructions with the hope that they can at least understand the Catholic religion. The one thing that upsets them in the promises is the raising of children. They are not particularly opposed to the children being Catholics, but many do not like the obligation of sending them to parochial schools. They are mentally wedded to public education, which they think is superior to any sectarian type. I think a lot of them equate Catholic schools with catechism schools.

Then, of course, there is the perennial problem of birth control. Most of them

want families. Some of them even want large families. But many cannot see how they can start a family immediately, and they feel that the Church has no right to dictate regarding this matter. The suggestion of rhythm is met rather coldly. They have heard that it works only for a few, that even then it is uncertain, and that it demands a long period of heroic abstinence. Also, they all have Catholic friends, or friends who have Catholic friends who pay no attention to the Church in this matter.

Another problem is therapeutic abortion. Most of them are convinced that, in any choice, the Church teaches that the safety of the child comes before that of the mother. They are relieved to find that this isn't exactly true, but they are not totally relieved, for they conjure up cases in which the attempt to save both is almost the same as a death warrant for the mother.

"TOTALITARIAN" CHURCH

These, then, are the types that I have encountered in three years of Newman Club work at Ohio State University. And from my previous experience in Information Centers, I think they represent a condensed version of practically all the Protestants who approach the Church whether in view of conversion or merely to object. I have omitted only one type, to the best of my knowledge. And that is the person who is disturbed by the "totalitarian" aspect of Catholicism, and who sees it as a threat to individual liberties.

I have omitted this type, not because questions of this nature have never arisen, but because they have not arisen frequently. (The question of censorship does arise frequently however.) I have encountered these matters chiefly among professionals, ministers belonging to the POAU and professors generally tainted with agnosticism. I read about these objections. But seldom meet them. In some sections of the country, this program of the anti-Catholic may have taken hold, but I have not discovered it for myself. And political results and political polls seem to minimize it.

THE JEW

By James B. Lloyd, C.S.P.

Someone should do a thorough study on "The Problems and Difficulties of a Jewish Person — Before, During and After Taking Instructions." Such a study would prove immensely interesting and exceedingly helpful. This sort of treatment of my topic cannot possibly be attempted here. My contribution to this panel discussion is a much more limited one. My hope is to open a door to a somewhat difficult problem and to throw some light on it from my personal experience.

I cannot claim anything like a vast acquaintance with the subject. But my own family background and work as a Paulist have given me considerable interest and experience in this phase of our apostolate. My father and all his family are Russian Jews. And my missions in South Africa and work at our Information Center in New York City help fill in the background for my remarks. This, therefore, is not so much an adequate approach to a huge subject but rather a personal experience. In presenting these impressions, I've selected several cases from our files and from these I'd like to advance some opinions. (Certain details have been disguised to respect the identity and privacy of the cases discussed.)

FAMILY OPPOSITION

Case No. 1: Let's call this girl Sylvia. She is in her middle twenties and comes from a Jewish Orthodox family. Her people are meticulously faithful to the religious outlook and customs of the Orthodox Synagogue. And some of her relatives are rabbis. Association with a Catholic co-worker gave rise to her curiosity about Catholicism. She came faithfully to our course of instructions and manifested exceptional interest. When she completed the course, we advised her to delay her reception in view of the gravity of the step and the unfortunate attitude of her family.

Five months later, on Christmas Eve, she

was baptized. On the following evening, I was visited by a group of her relatives. They came to protest vigorously against her action, and to assert that she was still a Jewess despite her baptism. One of the visitors added a touch of emphasis by declaring that even if I poured all the water in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans over her, she would still remain a Jewess. It was inconceivable to them that one with her heritage and background could be guilty of such disloyalty. They concluded that her action was motivated either by some weakness of character or even a mental collapse. Some felt that the whole matter should be taken to court or that she be compelled to take psychiatric treatment.

It was impossible to persuade them that her love for them (and for the entire tradition of Judaism) was compatible with acceptance of Christ and the New Israel He brought to earth. Her father told me that he had lost a son in Korea but that the "loss" of his daughter was much more painful since it involved her rejection of her own people. Her action, they said, might mean the death of her parents. (This dire prophesy is frequently made in similar circumstances.) The girl is now obliged to live away from home. But she is a daily communicant, and spends an hour in prayer daily before the Blessed Sacrament.

Case No. 2: This man we'll call Louie. He's in his middle thirties and is an extremely competent, successful consultant in his field. He is married to a Jewess and lives in a fashionable suburb. I'd have to say that when he first came, he was a materialist. The rich spiritual and religious traditions of the Old Testament had been lost for him. He was thoroughly dissatisfied with his life, however, despite his worldly achievements. And being of a serious turn of mind he argued that, since there was no point to existence, suicide was the logical step to take.

His relatives and friends were distressed

at his mental state and advised him to approach a psychiatrist. Fortunately, his Catholic secretary—who had occasionally recommended various Catholic devotions to him—finally invited him to undertake a complete course of instructions. This he did. Not one to make a hasty decision in such matters, he studied, prayed and reflected for an entire year. At that time he was baptized. Since then, he finds immense consolation, light and strength in a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Case No. 3: Here we have a man just turned forty, an extremely busy executive. His first son was born mentally defective. While keenly aware of many aspects of the Jewish heritage and sensitive to discrimination, he was raised without formal religious training. Restless and dissatisfied, he sought for some philosophy of life which would bring him fulfillment. Eventually he sought this in the Catholic Church; and he became a Catholic.

His wife is an exceptionally able lawyer and constantly bombards him with objections to Catholicism. "A Catholic must abdicate reason." "Your thinking is done for you by the Chancery." "Why should the Church act as censor of the theater, art and movies?" "What right has the Church to concern herself with public morality?" Since she scorns the supernatural, he must bear up under the cross of her complete misunderstanding of his religion.

EFFECTS OF PERSECUTION

Case No. 4: Paul is in his early forties and is a consultant in the field of public health. He was brought up as an Orthodox Jew, but abandoned it in early adolescence. The pogroms in Russia and Poland instituted by Christians against the Jews loomed large in his early education. And he was taught to spit when passing a Christian church. A man of keen intelligence and integrity, he pondered over the larger issues of life. Having made a thorough investigation of Catholicism, he eventually asked for baptism and was received. This action was delayed for some time, however, out of respect for his family and the ill-effects his reception would cause his loved ones.

Case No. 5: Blanche is in her middle thirties and holds a prominent position in secondary education. Her attraction to the

Church arose from her acquaintance with another teacher with whom she shared a common interest in art. At the suggestion of her Catholic friend, she took the full course at our center. At its completion, she decided, regretfully, not to be baptized. But the issue was not closed; she continued to attend follow-up courses. Watching various classes complete the course and enter the Church brought her keen distress. "But," she explained, "what sort of home will I go to if I ever become a Catholic?"

PURPOSE IN LIFE

Case No. 6: Mrs. L. M. is in her middle forties and is an artist. Books, painting and cultural pursuits played a large part in her education. But spiritual emptiness, cynicism and materialism were equally prominent in her upbringing. Her eventual dissatisfaction with the lack of purpose in this sort of life led her to turn to Catholicism for interior peace. Her most serious misgiving regarding reception into the Church was revealed in her poignant question: "Will I be a traitor to my people if I become a Catholic?"

Case No. 7: Miss H. is a reader for a large publishing house. This reading of manuscripts which frequently referred to Catholicism caused her initial interest in the Church. Both her parents are lawyers: neither is attracted to religion. Before Miss H. was baptized, her mother attempted to delay the ceremony, claiming that her daughter was emotionally unbalanced and that she should undergo psychiatric treatment for a year. This suggestion was ignored; the girl was baptized and leaves nothing to be desired as a well-balanced person and a devout Catholic.

These cases are taken from among the forty-three Jewish converts we have received in the past four years. They are quite typical and enable us to draw some tentative conclusions regarding the obstacles to the conversion of Jewish people. It is customary to consider three divisions among them: Orthodox; Reform, which is a reaction against the extremes of Orthodox conservatism; and Conservative, which arose as a protest against the extent of the changes introduced by the Reform group. My experience, however, has been confined to those who do not actually fall into any of

these groups. My inquirers were those with little or no connection with Judaism as a religion.

Point 1. The Jew, whether religious or not, has a deep pride and sense of loyalty to his people. Conversion to Christianity, therefore, raises the question of treason to one's people. Acceptance of the Divinity of Christ seems in a special way to epitomize that rejection of one's flesh and blood. It is not so much a matter of doctrine as such, as it is a question of ethnic, social and historical associations behind the doctrine. Hence the Jewish convert often faces pressure before his baptism and perhaps ostracism afterwards.

Secondly, all this may well be the subconscious result of the centuries of persecution at the hands of Christians. It may also help to explain the keen sensitivity of the Jew to anything that savors of or even appears to be discrimination. So through the centuries, they have resisted assimilation by Christian groups and do not enter easily into marriage with a Christian.

Thirdly, in the case of individuals who are skeptically or agnostically inclined, it is possible for them to attend Synagogue on the high feast days. This allegiance is not necessarily based on any religious conviction but is founded more on ethnic considerations.

Fourthly, in the matter of morality among these inquirers I have instructed, it seems to be a horizontal thing: a man to man relationship; not a vertical thing: a matter which primarily affects our relations with God. Heaven and hell are here, not in some future life. You are rewarded or punished in this present life. The secularizing influences of modern times have influenced Christian and Jew. And I have found it particularly difficult to impress the inquirers I am discussing with the reality of God, the

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necessity of grace and the certainty of the hereafter. This type of Jew is usually unacquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament and it is frequently useless to try to use the Old Testament as common ground.

Once again, I must repeat that my experience has not led me into close contact with many religious-minded Jews, but rather with those who have lapsed from their religious heritage even though they retain a loyalty to their people. My Jewish inquirers have come from an urban, well-educated, successful segment of the Jewish people who have learned their desperate need of religion and found satisfaction in the Church of Christ.

Prayer of a Missionary: "Teach us, dear Mother, to understand that we need not always know the plans of God. Take from us any ambition for self in the victory of your Son, and teach us that we must have a ministry of years of faith and effort; maybe years of suffering; maybe years of peace. And teach us, Mother, not to be like those disciples so quick to expression, so anxious to reach out to obtain the prize. Teach us to be like you, acting in God's will, always true and faithful, and wanting nothing—except God."

—*Father James M. Drought, M.M.*

Guide Lights

HELP WANTED . . .

This column welcomes news of any convert-winning activities undertaken by you our readers. The Apostolate to non-Catholics suffers from a lack of exchange of views on the part of those who are deeply involved in this somewhat neglected area of the Church's mission. Information from priests and seminarians about what you are doing in your parish, diocese or seminary to advance the work will be gratefully received and perhaps be of help to other readers.

CATECHETICS IN THE MISSIONS . . .

Watch for the world-wide catechetical movement to receive increasing attention in the United States. A spur to this study and debate was the success of the International Study Week on Mission Catechetics held at Eichstaett (near Munich) in July. Some 250 participants shared their knowledge and experience in order to adapt the latest catechetical principles to the Church's apostolate in mission lands. Missionary bishops, delegates from the mission fields discussed their problems with experts on catechetics and missiology from Europe and America.

Next month, we hope to publish in GUME an interview with Father Johannes Hofinger, S.J., on the catechetical movement, along with the conclusions agreed upon at the Eichstaett meeting. The papers read at the Study Week are to be published by Herder and Herder. No one who teaches religion at any level—least of all, those who instruct American inquirers—can afford to neglect this providential revival in the field of catechetics.

NUNS AND NON-CATHOLIC AMERICA . . .

Chalk up another credit for excellent pioneering to Father Jerome F. Wilkerson, director of the Catholic Information Center in St. Louis. This highly successful venture was a three-day workshop on "The Apostolate of Sisters Among Non-Catholics." It was held at Mercy Hospital in Oklahoma City in August. About fifty local Mercy teaching and nursing Sisters attended. In addition, representatives from the St. Louis Province, which includes Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, also participated.

Topics discussed at the workshop included: The Convert Apostolate in the

United States and Present Trends; Ecumenism and the coming General Council; Special Opportunities of Sisters in Winning Converts. Three talks were devoted to the mentalities we encounter: The Lutheran; the other Protestants; the Jew and the un-Churched. The final day centered on subjects like Apologetics; Catechetical Texts; Teaching Aids; and Reading for the Apostolate.

Other speakers, besides Father Wilkerson, were two converts: Captain Walter Dakin Williams and Mr. Ernest Beck. Captain Williams is an Air Force legal officer and brother of playwright Tennessee Williams. He was reared in his grandfather's Episcopal rectory and was converted while on active duty with the Air Force during World War II. Mr. Beck is a former Lutheran minister who was received into the Church with his wife and son in 1954. He has been director of the Catholic Refugee Program in St. Louis and has completed studies in Catholic Theology and Scripture.

The reaction of the Sisters can be gathered from a letter of the Sister Superior to Father Wilkerson: "Words cannot begin to tell you how enthusiastic we are over the results of the workshop" and for stirring us out of "our own passive attitudes to this tremendously important apostolate."

CONVERT CONFERENCE IN DAVENPORT . . .

This column is indebted to Father Gerard Weber of Chicago for the details of a Conference on Adult Catechetics held in Iowa City, Iowa, on August 30th. Some 85 priests of the Davenport diocese met in the Memorial Union of the University of Iowa to discuss the Apostolate to non-Catholics throughout their area. The skillful hand of Father Joseph Hines was evident in the arrangements for this successful project.

In addition to an attractive program, the priests were presented with a digest of the status of the convert apostolate in the form of statistics and charts. This careful study covered the period 1953-1959. Highlighting the necessity of the Conference was the frank conclusion: "In recent years the number of converts has not kept pace with the growth of the number of priests and Catholic population." Significant items in this forthright analysis:

1. Converts per priest per year: 2.9. (This is slightly above the national average which is estimated at 2.7 per priest.)

2. The diocese receives one convert per year for each 140 Catholics.

3. The diocese of Davenport is 14.1% Catholic. (It was noted that 10% of the population of Africa is Catholic.)

4. Infant baptisms for 1953-59 totaled 24,140. Converts in this same period: 4,448.

Between 10 A. M. and 4:30 P. M., four separate sessions were held to discuss various aspects of the apostolate. In the first, Msgr. M. J. Dingman of Davenport analyzed the "Convert Statistics in the Davenport Diocese." He was followed by Father William Cogan of Chicago who spoke on "Recruiting Prospects."

Topic for the second session was the "Content of an Adult Course in Catechetics" with Father Gerard Weber as speaker. Attention focused on Bishop Ralph Hayes at the beginning of the third session who spoke on "Motivation and Inspiration in Convert Work." He was immediately followed by Father Robert Welch who discussed "The Mind of the Inquirer, Iowa, 1960." "Follow-up Work" was the topic of Father Charles Karl of Moline, Ill., in the closing session.

Priests who plan a similar "Convert Day for Priests" will be interested in the format of each session. It was designed to utilize the best talent available, to present stimulating talks and especially to encourage discussion and personal experiences. A minimum of time was devoted to the formal talks; emphasis was placed on audience participation. Each session had a different chairman and a panel of two or three priests experienced in convert work. Each talk was followed by a 45-minute buzz session, after which reports and questions were submitted to the panel. Visual aids, films, literature and tapes were available.

Father Weber comments: "The speakers were good and the discussions were terrific. These priests were all genuinely interested! Immense good was accomplished."

PAROCHIAL INFORMATION CENTER . . .

Father Paul Collis, of Bloomfield, N. J., is planning to open a completely equipped information center in his parish. We both consulted Father Arthur Campbell, now a pastor on Staten Island, N. Y., who when assistant at Pelham, N. Y., operated a uniquely successful parish center for twelve years. Says Father Campbell: a parish center, accessible as any store on the street level, with an attractive window, makes the Church available to any inquirer of good will. It brings people to us who are not yet prepared to undertake a full course of instructions. It does not produce a spectacular, immediate rise in converts. But it

creates a favorable climate for conversions, and serves as a necessary preparation for people who eventually do enter the local inquiry class.

Requirements: A store prominently and conveniently located; a professional, salaried receptionist; a growing library of books and pamphlets; a priest-director who is prepared to devote as much of his time as possible to interviews. Expense, in part, can be met by the sale of missals, prayerbooks, Christmas cards and some types of religious articles. Twelve families in Pelham were persuaded to undertake a portion of the expenses, each selecting a month.

READING I'VE LIKED . . .

Will Herberg thinks that there are numerous sound elements in the current Return to Religion. The Dominican Father Bruckberger believes that innumerable Americans are ripe for conversion to the Catholic Church. Father Joseph Fichter talks about the elements in the Americanization of Catholicism. All these and many other good things are to be found in "Roman Catholicism and the American Way of Life." Edited by Thomas T. McAvoy, C.S.C. (Notre Dame: \$4.50).

No greater problem faces the preacher and catechist than how to draw on the riches of the liturgy and the Bible in our presentation of Christ's message. Invaluable for this purpose is "The Liturgy and the Word of God." (The Liturgical Press: \$3.50.)

Lessons on the Sacrament of Penance for non-Catholic inquirers are apt to dwell more on answers to Protestant objections than on the positive elements in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. "Confession"; by The Community of St. Severin (Fides Publishers: \$3.25) goes a long way to reveal the neglected riches of this Sacrament of God's Mercy.

An excellent reference book, for both instructor and inquirer, is "What Is the Eucharist?" by Marie-Joseph Nicholas, O.P. (Hawthorn Books: \$2.95). A volume of the Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism. The doctrinal and devotional aspects of the Blessed Sacrament are treated thoroughly and interestingly.

It will be a refreshing experience for any priest to reflect on the view of the priesthood today stressed by Abbe Michonneau's "My Father's Business." (Herder and Herder: \$2.95). Here we have the later and more mature reflections on the place of the priest in the world by the author of the famous "Revolution in a City Parish." If you enjoyed the author's previous books, you will relish this as well.